

COLLECTIVE BRAND IDENTITY

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ABSTRACT

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<p>Tiivistelmä – Referat – Abstract</p> <p>Corporate communications and management have had for a long time the conviction that they could project a specific brand identity by communicating a strong vision. Today this view is being challenged, especially with the rise of social media, which has brought more visibility to customer communities and has enabled better tools for customers to communicate with each other instantly, anywhere in the world. People interacting with each other in their communities give an identity to the brands, a collective identity that can be different from the one that corporate communications try to project. It is, therefore, necessary for the brands to understand how customers collectively impact brand identity.</p> <p>The concepts of top-down brand identity models do not work very well in today's interconnected world. With that in mind, this thesis looks at a bottom-up approach to the brand identity model. It aims to bring further attention to the impact that brand communities have on brand identity. Through a model for collective brand identity, the objective is to make it easier for brands to see their brand identity from a customers' perspective and enable them to envision their future collective identities.</p> <p>This thesis is conducted as qualitative research including a model, case studies and interviews looking into the brand identity as a collective construction. It initially looks into existing research on collective identity in general as well as in brands. Then, it discusses existing models for brand identity and social movements. Based on the insight from the literature, this study attempts to formulate a model for collective brand identity. It uses the case studies as illustrations and proof of concept for the model. Lastly, four in-depth interviews are conducted to explore further how the model can be applied in real-life in order to study and categorise brands based on their collective identity.</p> <p>This research identifies four main types of collective identity in brands based on the community characteristics and personal sense of belonging, which is, how individual identities relate to that of the brand. These brand types are Influencer, Collaborative, Collective and Outlier. In general, the more collective the brand communities are, the more substantial impact they have on the brand's identity and the higher the sense of belonging to their communities, the more loyal customers they are.</p>		
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1. INTRODUCTION

For a long time, corporate communications and management trusted that they could project a specific brand identity by communicating a strong vision. Today this view is changing, especially with the rise of social media, which has brought more visibility to customer communities and has enabled better tools for customers to communicate with each other instantly anywhere in the world. People interacting with each other in their communities give an identity to the brands. This collective identity may be different from the one that corporate communications are trying to project.

According to Hatch & Schultz (2004, p. 74), “**Collective Identity** (Figure 1) is activated when the most salient features of self-concept become those that are shared with other members of the in-group (or communities)”.

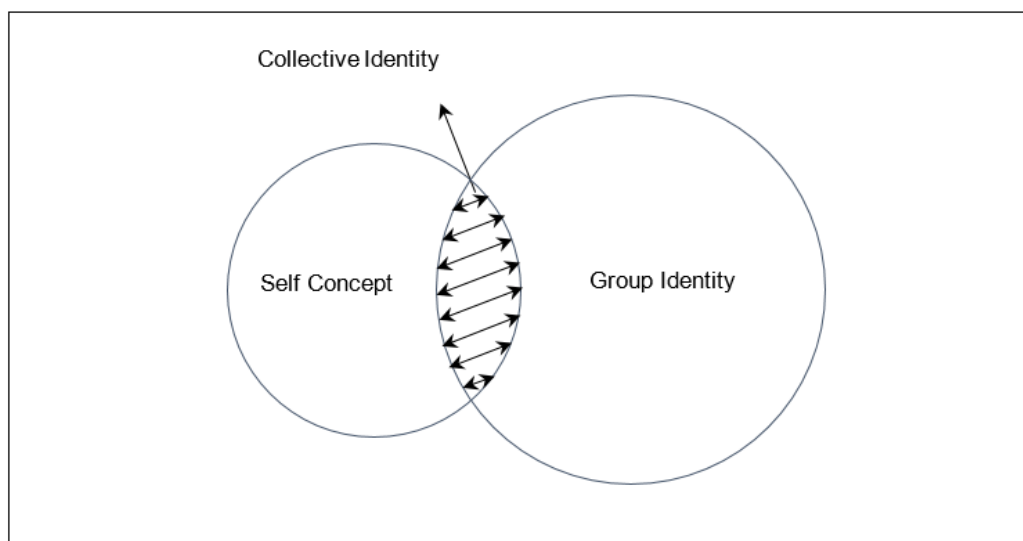


Figure 1. Collective Identity. Source: (Hatch & Schultz, 2004)

Communities arise when people sharing common identities interact with each other (Hatch & Schultz, 2004, p. 74). The notion of a collective identity refers to this set of individuals' sense of belonging to the community. For the individual, the identity derived from the community becomes part of his or her identity. To put it in another form, Collective Identity is the way that individuals interacting and doing things together can gain a sense of connection. This identity goes beyond one person and belongs to the whole community. The world is full of communities, for example,

musicians, scientists, football fans, marathon runners, liberals and conservatives, among others.

Communities gather around brands as well and are a critical factor in shaping brand identity. Fan communities across the world use the Internet to connect with people with similar interests. These groups build websites, blogs and other channels of interaction and communication in order to celebrate brands they love (Hatch & Schultz, 2008).

Godin (2008) describes brand communities as tribes. “A tribe is a group of people connected to one another, connected to a leader, and connected to an idea” (Godin, 2008, p. 1). Godin sees the fact that now tribes are more accessible than ever to find, organise, and experience as an opportunity with the Web, enabling an explosion of all kinds of them and has created a shortage of people to lead them (Godin, 2008).

Brand researchers Albert Muniz and Thomas O'Guinn (2001) coined the term “brand community” to describe specialised non-geographically bounded set of relationships that develop among admirers of a brand. Their study (Muniz & O'Guinn, 2001) of communities that formed around Saab, Harley Davidson, and Apple showed that brand communities shared characteristics similar to those used in social sciences to define peoples' communities in general.

For brands, individuals in their community are communicators for the brand. Brand management, therefore, cannot be seen only as a part of the corporate communications' team. Today more than ever, with the social channels at everyone's fingertips, all employees, customers, and other stakeholders have a voice with global reach and therefore collectively contribute to collective brand identity. “When more and more people are capable of communicating on a truly global scale, it becomes more difficult for any organisation to control channels and messages” (Juholin, et al., 2014, p. 2).

Further, product development is also becoming more and more decentralised from a top-down (or waterfall) model to a bottom-up (agile) approach. Therefore, brands are not sure about the outcome of product development. These factors create a gap in brand identity vision, requiring both adaptability and flexibility for facing the unknown.

1.1. Objectives

Externally, customer communities, and internally, management, communications, and all employees are the main ingredients in forming brand identities. The digital economy has brought more visibility to customer communities and has enabled easy and direct communication between different parties. All employees working within a company, for example, are communicators using social media channels. Through blogs, YouTube, Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter, the voice of the customers' of a brand can be as strong as or more potent than the voice of a significant publication. As a result, controlling a consistent message has become a much more significant challenge for brands than ever before. The concepts of top-down brand identity models do not work very well. With that in mind, I will aim at looking at a bottom-up approach to the brand identity model, which I am calling "collective brand identity". I will aim to answer the following research questions:

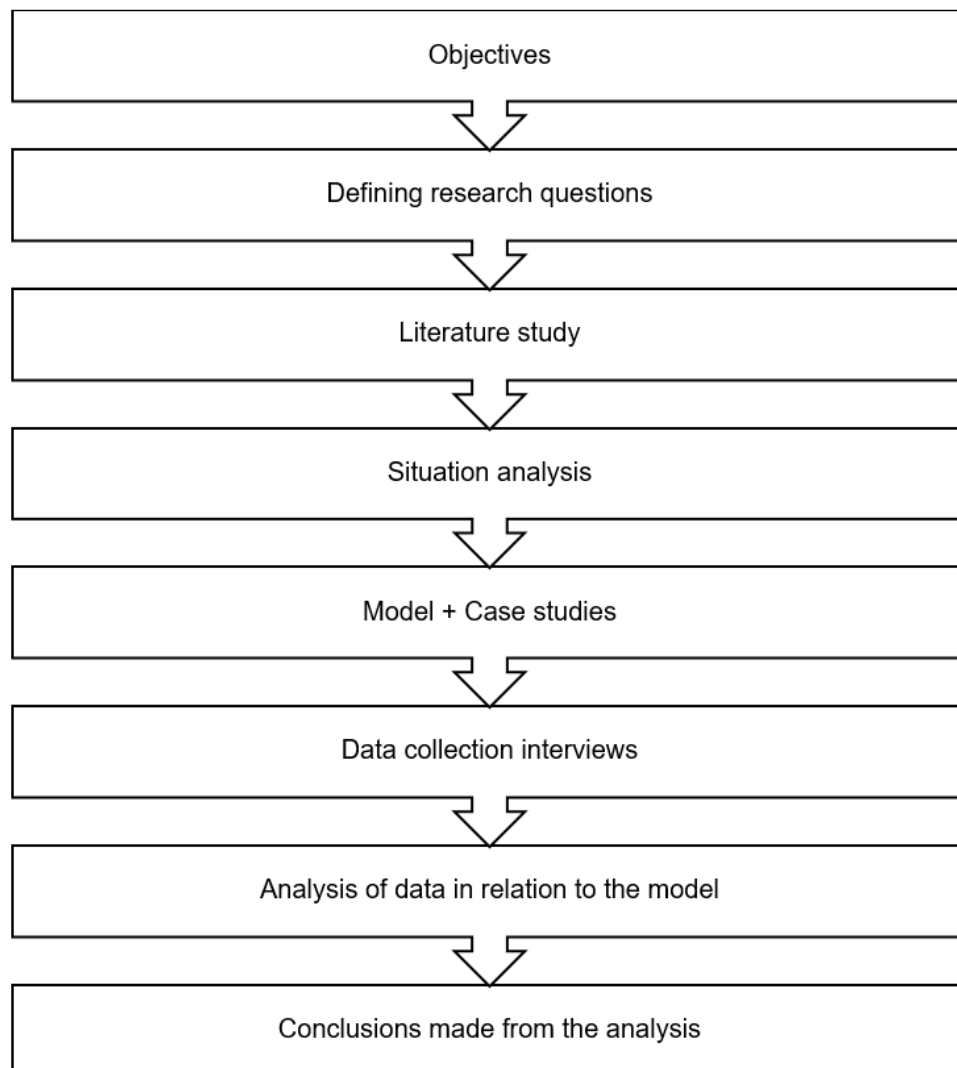
Question 1: What model can we use for studying collective brand identity?

Question 2: Can the model be used in practice to group and study brands?

1.2. Research method in brief

I look into existing literature that tries to define collective identity in general, as well as in businesses and other types of organisations. Then, I discuss different models for corporate identity and social movements. Based on the insight from the literature, I attempt to create a model for collective brand identity. Further, I present different cases and types of collective identity in organisations in order to illustrate the concept of my model and in an attempt to understand better how the collective identity of brands forms. As part of my empirical research, I will conduct interviews and discuss the results, testing the model's validity. I will compose a questionnaire for individuals in four organisations to collect further information for improving the model. I will also try to identify common patterns for the conditions in which different collective identities form. Figure 2 illustrates the structure of my thesis and research steps.

Figure 1. A summary of the structure of the thesis



2. LITERATURE AND THEORETICAL FOCUS

This chapter compares definitions for brand identity and collective identity from different areas of research. It is self-evident that there is no collective identity without the need for being collective. Therefore, I will introduce the need for collectiveness and the social aspect as an integral part of the collective identity. For the same reason, I will also compare collective identity with individual identity.

2.1. Corporate brand identity models

Most of the literature looks at brand identity as something that is created by corporate communications through its communications strategies, consistent branding, and messages towards its customers and other stakeholders. By doing so, they miss entirely the role that groups of customers play collectively in creating the brands' identity. Therefore, they do not suggest an impact from the interaction between the customers and the brand on brand identity.

According to Howard (1998), corporate identity is created by the company, and it is the organisation's "apparent manifestation" or visual representation in the form of the brand's name, visuals, symbols, or logo. He states that it is essential to have a clear and strong identity in order to stand out from the competitors and for the stakeholders to immediately recognise, for example, the clear, well-known, and unique logo. Therefore, in order to be successful, "the different components of a corporate identity need to be standardised and unitary" (Howard, 1998, p. 4).

The way how Howard (1998) views brand identity seems very narrow today. Brand identity cannot be only about the logo or corporate symbols. It includes "a set of features and dimensions that determine the brand's way of being, thinking and behaving" (Buil, et al., 2015). Hence, the brand identity is part of the profound impact that the brand and its customer and other stakeholder community make on a person. Our association with a brand does not originate simply from the visual representation. People do not usually decide to purchase something from a company based on the uniqueness of its logo. For example, I am not very interested in purchasing on Amazon

because its logo means that Amazon sells everything from A to Z. Apple's logo is very iconic but only because of Apple's overall success.

Howard (1998) sees corporate identity and image as two separate but essential notions that should be planned carefully and systematically, as well as executed consistently in order to protect the brand from the competition. He suggests that, while identity is a brand's visual representation, image is the stakeholders' perception of it (Howard, 1998, p.3).

Also, according to Argenti & Forman (2002), a company's identity is "the concrete, often visual, manifestation of its reality, including names, brands, symbols, self-presentations, corporate sponsorships, and, most significantly, company's vision" (Argenti & Forman, 2002, p. 68). These images form the reputation of the brand and how it is perceived by the stakeholders (Argenti & Forman, 2002, p. 68).

Brand identity concepts mentioned above dedicate the brand identity to the company communications only and their strategic value for the organisation. They do not take into account how identity is formed within the stakeholder communities.

Many recognise the importance of customer involvement in forming identities. They try to approach this by suggesting customer understanding as an element of brand identity. According to Schmitt (Schmitt, et al., 2003, p. 112), as part of understanding their customers, brands will gain knowledge about the characteristics of their customers and choose the customer types they want to interact with. There are three general customer categories for brand relationships: high-value customers, high difficulty customers, and high demand customers (Schmitt, et al., 2003). In this model, each category includes subtypes, resulting in eight customer types, as shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Customer Types for Brand Relationship Building (Schmitt, et al., 2003)

	VALUABLE	DIFFICULT	DEMANDING
Characteristics	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Existing • Potential: decision-makers • Influencer groups 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Media resistant and resentful • Micro niche 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Highly knowledgeable • With high expectations

It is evident why a corporate would invest and focus on high-value customers. They bring most of the value for the company. By meaningful targeting of high-value customers and the use of interaction and dialogue, brands can gain insight and build customer relationships. Brands offer real value to the customers through a great experience that builds trust in and connection with the brand. A deep understanding of current trends in customer culture, entertainment, and lifestyle enables companies to deliver more value. Business Intelligence and digital data analytics have also enabled better customer understanding by making sense of customers' digital footprints and demographics. Digital data analytics excels on the bases that digital communities and digital footprints are today's real-life communities and interactions.

2.2. Collective identity

Social psychologists often have assumed that individual and collective identities are two separate things. A person's gender, political views and religion are commonly seen of as collective aspects of the identity while the physical features, psychological characteristics, tastes and abilities are seen as innate characteristics of a person's identity, (Gregen, 1971; Triandis, 1990).

According to Simon (2004, pp. 54-55), "the collective identity is a self-aspect that defines a social category of which oneself is a member among others, whereas, in the individual identity, collective identity is one feature among several other features of

oneself". Both individual and collective identities originate from specific social conditions the individual has experienced during life. Most of the characteristics of a person's identity can provide the basis for a collective identity. Simon sees the individual identity as a pool that allows us to experience new and existing collective identities. (Simon, 2004).

A third view comes from British philosopher Malik (2008), who explains that our individual identity comes as a result of experiences we create ourselves. "The inner self finds its home in the outer world by participating in a collective" with which we identify most. According to Malik (2008), everybody's sense of identity is linked to a small number of categories – "collectives defined by people's gender, sexuality, religion, race and, in particular, culture". He suggests that there is no authentic self-identity since it is formed through interaction with society. (Malik, 2008).

Polletta & Jasper (2001), argue that part of the collective identity are both concrete and imagined communities emerging from the interactions with different people, and they are not static. "Collective identities are in constant interplay with personal identities, but they are never simply an aggregate of individual identities" (Polletta & Jasper, 2001). If we consider this in terms of brand identity, it can never be precisely the same as communicated by its corporate communicators within its customer communities.

These four different studies suggest different perspectives on the relationship between individual identity and collective identity. However, they all agree that collective identity is part of everybody who goes through life and becomes part of a social group or community.

In today's interconnected world, digital technology serves as a melting pot for cultures. Individuals are exposed to so many cultures simultaneously that it has become almost easy to choose one's social circles and hence, identity, regardless of the physical geographical location. We have access to more different communities and social groups than ever before and pressure to follow and keep up with the new trends. This environment can make self-identity "fragmented; composed, not of a single, but several, sometimes contradictory or unresolved, identities" (Hall, et al., 1992).

2.3. The Social Self

As social species, our success is by large due to our ability to interact with each other. Our capacity for cooperation and complex, coordinated interaction largely depends on our ability to imagine, plan, assess behaviours, and to adopt the values and traditions of the communities in which we are part of (Forgas & Williams, 2002, p. 3). According to Mead (1934), the self is a product of culture made of symbolic representations about ourselves that we construct on the bases of interactions with others.

Hofstede's life work focuses on cultural differences. One of the four dimensions of these cultural differences is collectivism vs individualism which explains the degree that people want to be part of a collective group based on social, economic, and historical factors (Hofstede, et al., 2010, pp. 90-131). According to Hofstede (2010, p. 90) how collective we are, depends on how collective the societies we are brought up and live in are. There are specific characteristics that we, as individuals, embrace as part of ourselves based on these social conditions. Based on an extensive and long-term empirical study with the IBM employees globally, Hofstede (2010) has uncovered and grouped many characteristics of individualist and collectivist societies that correspond with the values of people in these societies.

Hofstede's studies show another way of explaining identity. As social species, we tend to become part of the communities we live in, and that identify most with our social self. Our own identity, therefore, cannot be separated entirely from the identity of the social groups. In contrary, our individual identities and those of our communities are in a continues interaction, impacted by each other and evolving.

2.4. Social Motivation and Influence

Several historical examples have demonstrated the powerful effect of communities and their social networks on society. Physicist Jari Saramaki is studying this phenomenon through big data, identifying the common patterns of how people's networks organise and function. He explains in his blog (Saramaki, 2017) that networks are everywhere

and that we, human beings, have digital footprints of this activity; “social ties” to our friends and colleagues, who also have “social-ties” to other friends and colleagues, and so on - all being part of an enormous social network that links everybody in the world.

Saramaki’s empirical research focuses on applying community detection methods to the large real-world digital mobile social network. Large complex networks, according to Saramaki, show different levels of organising. “At the mesoscopic scale communities are considered the most important structures that relate to system function”. (Saramäki, et al., 2011, p. 1)

In social network analytics, individuals are seen as nodes and communities as clusters or groups of nodes with dense internal and loose inter-group connectivity. Beyond this simple notion, however, even the definition of a community is a controversial issue. Even with extensive research in this area, little is known about their performance on large, real-world networks and about the meaningfulness of the community structure they produce. (Saramäki, et al., 2011, p. 1).

Still, patterns observed in digital networks are the best information we have today when it comes to explaining and understanding patterns and the roles of different people within a social network or community. Many studies have focused particularly on influentials. They are described as highly active individuals in their communities, making for only 10% of the population (Keller & Berry, 2003, pp. 27-75). Gladwell (2002) illustrates several real-life examples of how a tiny number of these super influential people can impact the way our society behaves in a short time sparking what he calls a “successful trend”. He (Gladwell, 2002) categorises different influential types of people playing different roles as “Connectors”, “Mavens” and “Salesman” and also lays out many other factors that can “tip” a trend. Following are the characteristics of these types as defined by Gladwell:

- Connectors are individuals who have many acquaintances in many different spheres of society. They act as outlets through which spawn new connections that otherwise might not have ever occurred. Connectors are important because “all of us can reach them in only a few steps”. (Gladwell, 2002, pp. 38-48)

- Mavens “connect us with new information” because they are curious to learn and find out about new things. They love to spread their knowledge because they love to help others make informed decisions. (Gladwell, 2002, pp. 59-67)
- Salesmen have “unusual charisma” that “allows them to be extremely persuasive in inducing others decisions and behaviours”. They are important because they are capable to “draw others” into their “rhythms and dictate the terms of the interaction”. (Gladwell, 2002, pp. 70-83)

2.5. The collective identity of brands

In the previous sections, I established that similarly to how communities form around social movements; they also form around brands. I reviewed literature that examined the relationship between social and individual identities and established that communities and society, in general, have an impact on the individual’s self-identity and vice versa. I will now focus more specifically on the impact that brands and individuals have on each other.

2.5.1. What is a brand identity?

The idea of brands having identities is problematic for some who believe that identity is strictly something that only people can experience. For them, the claim that the identity can belong or be attributed to brands does not make sense because it makes brands human. (Hatch & Schultz, 2004, p. 68). Others view a brand’s identity as an attribution of the identity of the individuals within the brand. Often brands would strategically select an individual – usually the CEO or somebody in the leadership to be the public face of the company. This could be explained by Apple’s Steve Jobs whose name was often used as a synonym of Apple, and customers perceive themselves in association with what the company represents. By purchasing Apple’s products, its customers “reinforce their sense of how they want to perceive themselves” (Sherman, n.d.).

Another view on brand identity is as a property of the organisation, something that can be managed entirely and shaped by the group of individuals whose activities comprise

the organisation (Hatch & Schultz, 2004, p. 3). Benetton, for example, used photographer, Oliviero Toscani, to shape the corporate image in the American market through strong visuals and message (Barela, 2003). Benetton's brand identity was thus linked to the visual campaign (Groucutt, et al., 2004, p. 74).

It is also essential to recognise that there are those researchers such as Wally Olin (1994), who are focusing primarily on brands' visual manifestations, including logos and livery. While visual identity is an integral part of the whole brand identity, this study will consider the brand identity more holistically; how it is perceived, moves people and connects with them. In this context, visual identity serves as one of the many ways that brand identity is perceived.

An important question arises from the different views of brand identity discussed earlier: If organisations can create unrealistic brand identities simply through communications' strategies such as visual campaigns, targeted messages and assigning a brand ambassador as the "face" of the brand; is brand identity then simply one more management fad to be used for the exploitation of others?

It is good to note also that the definitions of brand identity discussed above date prior to the rise of social media. Since then, brands have experienced and understood the impact of social movements on social media platforms, and some are struggling to keep up their projected brand reputation because of it. In the next section, I will look into more recent research that takes into consideration the interactions between the brand and its customer community within the brand identity concept.

2.6. Brand community

According to Muniz & O'Guinn (2001, p. 412) "a brand community is a specialised, non-geographically bound community, based on a structured set of social relations amongst the admirers of a brand". The members of the community share common interest and passion, or even love for a brand (Noël, et al., 2008). When people identify or feel that they are part of the brand community, they can be classified as brand community members (Zaglia, 2013). Muniz & O'Guinn (2001) elaborate this further

and suggest that each of these communities contains three common characteristics: “consciousness of kind”, “shared rituals and tradition”, and “moral responsibility”:

1) Consciousness of kind

This, “the most important element” of the brand community characteristics, is the feeling of connectedness with the brand and with others within the brand community even though members might be in different geographies. While members share a community spirit among each other, they also distance themselves from the others who do not use the brand. (Muniz & O'Guinn, 2001, p. 418).

2) Shared rituals and traditions

These rituals and traditions usually form around the “consumption experiences with the brand” and serve to reproduce the principles of the brand community within, as well as outside the community (Muniz & O'Guinn, 2001, pp. 421-422).

3) Moral responsibility

Brand communities can exhibit a moral responsibility expressed as a “sense of duty” or obligation towards the community and it “produces collective action and contributes to group cohesion” (Muniz & O'Guinn, 2001, pp. 424-426).

3. SITUATION ANALYSIS – TODAY’S SOCIO-ECONOMIC SITUATION

A little more than a decade ago, most people used the Internet to access email, search the web, and do online shopping. Brand websites were one of the very few channels for communications, product promotion and consumer services online. Relatively few people joined online communities, and social networking sites were in their infancy. The communications department had not yet started to worry about the number of online likes and fans the brand had.

Within the last 15 years, social media seems to have taken over the world. Today, social media platforms are used by one-in-three people in the world, and more than two-thirds of all internet users (Ortiz-Ospina, 2019). In a very short time, the use of social applications has become a sweeping cultural, social, and economic phenomena. Facebook’s social media platforms alone serve over 3 billion users (Facebook Inc., 2020). Every day, people are adopting new behaviours using social media; conducting social activities online, joining virtual communities, creating and organising political activities. All the new behaviours in which individuals and groups in the society participate play out on social media platforms. Indeed, many activities for which we travelled and required physical presence before are now taking place online.

More and more, it is the conversations that are taking place online, on social media, between customers, their opinions and feedback that guide choices and purchasing decisions today. In response, a new breed of social media corporate communications has evolved; listening to and engaging with customers' organic and authentic conversations on social media on communities over social networking platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, YouTube and TripAdvisor. Driven by competition and changes in customer behaviour, brands are required to embrace the social media phenomenon without previous experience in the area. This chapter will focus on how social media has impacted brands and corporate communications.

3.1. Social Media as a business growth opportunity

Most companies today are engaging with their audiences on social media platforms. Social Media has become a place for companies to meet their target audience; it has become a place for business-to-customer relationships to develop.

McKinsey research (Bughin, 2015) on the factors involved in a consumer's purchase choice, which gathered data from 1,000 brands across a wide range of product categories found that:

- There is a steady increase in the competition as branding channels proliferate.
- The more digitally empowered the customers become, the more “brand messages lose their impact”, and the smaller the “likelihood of conversion”.
- A robust array of digital experiences increases the chances for conversion digitally. (Bughin, 2015)

In a recent global survey on the state of social media marketing conducted by Buffer (2019), found that over 73% of the diverse group of marketers interviewed are confident that social media marketing has been efficient enough for their business. The survey also found that even though social media is a crucial part of marketing strategies today, yet nearly 20 per cent of the marketers are unsure how to measure its effectiveness (Buffer, 2019). Measuring the efficiency of social media can be a challenge, primarily because companies often focus on measuring the impact of their marketing activities and not that of the customer to customer activity. And yet, a new important metric seems to be created every week; from follower counts to post engagement percentages and leads.

3.1.1. Measuring Social Media ROI

Measuring return on investment (ROI) is not just about measuring clicks, fans and leads. ROI is a business metric, not a media metric. In other words, ROI is 100% media-agnostic and only measuring digital or social activities will not prove business success. Proving that the number of visitors on the web site has increased or that there is a

certain amount of Facebook fans is usually not enough. These are all very important nevertheless, but the social media manager needs to be able to translate this non-financial impact into a financial impact which can be a challenge.

The social media manager needs proof that the social media program is actually working. One way of doing this is to look at the customer transactions, the percentage of leads turning into customers and how much these spent over a given time, as well by measuring the tone of voice - positive vs negative. Advanced digital marketing platforms such as HubSpot, Marketo and Adobe Marketing include analytic tools to enable campaign reporting and make ROI relatively easy measure. Measuring ROI is not only crucial for proof of concept but also for the social media manager to learn what is working and what can be improved.

3.2. Digital communities

The social web has revealed surprising details about what people think about brands and how they are linked to different communities. Digital interactions of people online offer a hint of real-life networks. Some of these networks are connected to brands and therefore, play a role in the collective identity creation of brands. This is why it is important that they are studied and explored.

According to the Wikipedia article on Community Structures (2020), “a network is said to have community structure if the individuals (nodes) of the network can be easily grouped into (potentially overlapping) sets of nodes such that each set of nodes is densely connected internally. The pairs of nodes are more likely to be connected if they are both members of the same community(ies), and less likely to be connected if they do not share communities.” (Wikipedia, 2020).

The graphs below are generated using data algorithms of people’s interactions in their communities. They show that real-life connections are similarly represented in the digital world. For example, The Zachary karate club network (Figure 3) is a famous empirical network. A conflict between club president John (node 34) and the instructor Mr Hi (node 1) lead to 34 members of the university sports club to split into two groups.

The two digital communities detected are identical with the two actual communities.
(Liu, et al., 2014)

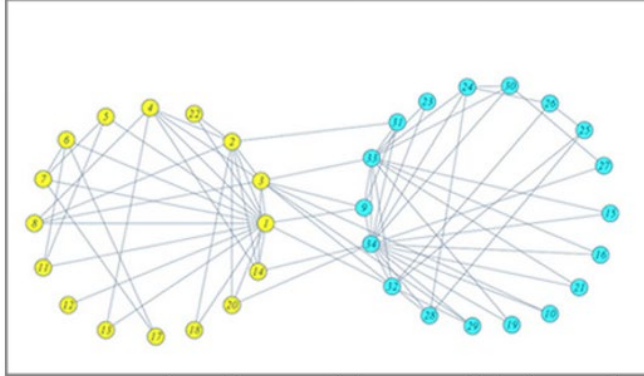


Figure 3. Zachary karate club network (Liu, et al., 2014)

In Figure 4, US college football network of 11 communities detected are identical to the 11 real conferences except for the eight independent teams (squares in orange), which are assigned to 3 different conferences respectively (Liu, et al., 2014).

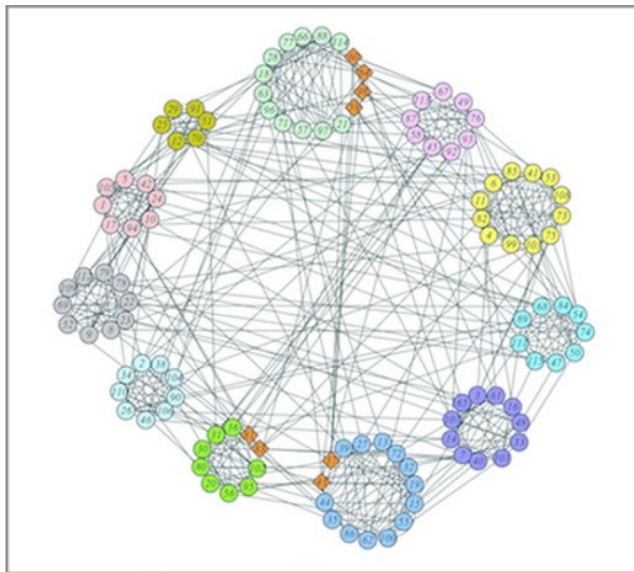


Figure 4. US college football network (Liu, et al., 2014)

These examples show that the virtual world is more real than we realise. Just like in the real world, digital actions and words speak loudly.

3.3. Conclusion

Based on the examples mentioned in this chapter, it is clear that traditional corporations see social media as an essential part of their communications and are investing in it. We still do not have a clear business model for social media and accurate ROI calculations. However, ways of proving the concept that social media works do exist and need to be utilised by social media managers.

A greater challenge is the lack of knowledge on how to do social media communications. This is keeping the companies from exploring social media to its full potential. However, companies see social media as an important platform for engaging with their customers and becoming part of their communities. This impacts the way how companies are starting to see their identity and brand formation as a two-way conversation with the customer communities rather than a one way delivery of brand's messages to the customers. What the Internet and social media have uncovered is that customers are talking about brands. The question is whether brands want to be part of the conversation.

4. THE COLLECTIVE IDENTITY MODEL

This chapter focuses on answering the main research question:

Question 1: What model can we use for studying collective brand identity?

Drawing from the literature and by merging theoretical concepts and approaches on social movements, communities and identity, I will propose a new model for studying collective identity. I will then look into some practical and historical case studies of brand identity experiences of Apple, Lego, Wikipedia and Yahoo!. I will do this in order to illustrate and explain my model further.

4.1. Literature synthesis

Research into brand identity has traditionally focused on the relationship between a brand's communicators and consumers. It is quite often seen as the sole responsibility of the brand to formulate and deliver the envisioned brand value to customer audiences. This is, however, a very narrow view of what is happening. As the social theorists backed by the big data scientists point out, communities play a crucial role in dissolving information and reshaping it. They too play a crucial role in forming a brand's identity. Identity stands, not in the narrow sense of logos and visuals but, identity as in brand value and personality. Communities, therefore, as the essential building blocks of social thought, play a significant role in brand identity creation. Hence, the collective identity of brands is closely related to the type of community or communities they are part of. In other words, as Muniz and O'Guinn (2001) suggest, brand communities are participating and play a crucial role in brand promise and legacy.

“A brand community is a specialised, non-geographically bound community, based on a structured set of social relationships among admirers of a brand. It is specialised because at its centre is a branded good or service. A brand community is marked by a shared consciousness, rituals and traditions, and a sense of moral responsibility. Each of these qualities is, however, situated within

a commercial and mass-mediated ethos, and has its own particular expression.”
(Muniz & O'Guinn, 2001).

Expanding further on this concept, one could argue that a brand community can permeate into the existing communities such as, for example, the minority rights groups resonate with Nike brand. As a result, they can adapt Nike into their communities. I will explain this further in this chapter.

Despite the importance given to communities in the modern social sciences, this is still rare, however, when it comes to the brand communities. It is why I have based my model for studying collective identity on two main parameters from social psychology studies: self-identity and community.

According to Hatch & Schultz (2008), there are two motivations for someone to champion your brand:

Self-concept towards the brand is personal, meaning that the brand becomes part of who you are. For example “I am a Mac person because I dislike Microsoft”.

Self-concept towards the brand is collective, meaning that the cause the brand represents is more significant than your own personal identity. For example “I am an anonymous contributor in Wikipedia because I praise its cause”. (Hatch & Schultz, 2008)

4.2. Collective identity types

As shown in Figure 5, I have identified four main types of collective identities based on the community characteristics and personal sense of belonging, meaning, how individuals' identity relates to that of the brand. These brands are **Influencer**, **Collaborative**, **Collective** and **Outlier**. I explain the characteristics of each of these brands later in this chapter. In general, the more collective the brand communities are,

the more substantial impact they have on the brand's identity and the higher the sense of belonging to their communities, the more loyal customers they are.

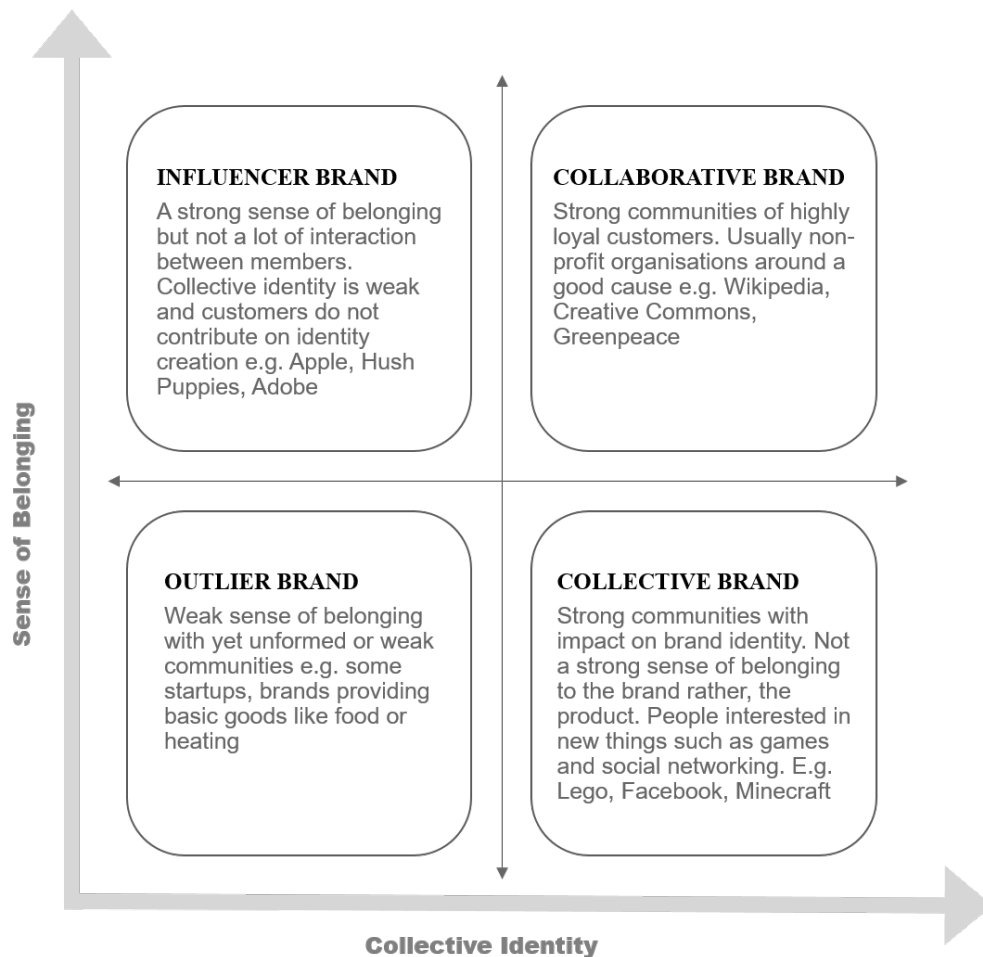


Figure 5. The Collective Identity Model

4.3. Case studies and further explanation of the model

Through these real-life case studies, this section will demonstrate how customer communities can impact and shape brand identity. They also serve as examples for the proposed Collective Brand Identity Model. I will describe the collective identities of three organisations, respectively Apple, Lego, Wikipedia and Yahoo!. I will try to analyse the specific qualities of these organizations that differ from the mainstream as well as I will attempt to find out whether they have specific qualities in common.

4.3.1. Apple

Apple's customers often manifest a strong association with their favourite brand, so quite often, they are referred to as fans. O'Grady (2009, p. 40) refers to Apple fans as "an enthusiastic bunch that takes their love of the computers and Apple to an entirely new level". They are known for waiting in line for hours in order to get their hands on the new Mac OS release. (O'Grady, 2009, p. 40)

Apple has a relationship with a well-defined consumer group that sees the product as part of their lifestyle.

"Historically, Apple emphasized fine industrial design, both hardware and software, that appealed to the designers, artists, and other creatives in the company's core audience who appreciated aesthetics. As the famous 1984 commercial indicated, the company framed itself in opposition to corporate "stiffs," which also resonated with the group. Third, there were many art, graphic, and media work you could do on a Mac that was impossible on a Windows machine. Apple became the physical embodiment of the customers' self-identity." (Sherman, 2010)

For decades, Apple also differentiated with its rock star, Steve Jobs. The CEO of Apple shook the technology world in 2007 when he presented the iPhone. His biography writer Anthony Imbimbo (2009) describes the moment like this:

"A crowd of thousands fixed their eyes on an empty stage. They were anxiously waiting for the star of the day to make an appearance. Finally, as music blared from loudspeakers, a middle-aged man dressed in blue jeans, sneakers, and a black turtleneck walked across the stage. The audience erupted into cheers and applause as he prepared to speak. If someone didn't know better, he or she might think the setting was a rock concert." (Imbimbo, 2009, p. 7)

Indeed, Apple's successful products correlate with Steve Jobs's vision on design. He was capable of leading the company through the notion of simplicity, user-friendliness and innovation. Apple is an excellent example of an influencer identity driven by the leadership.

4.3.2. Apple as an Influencer Brand

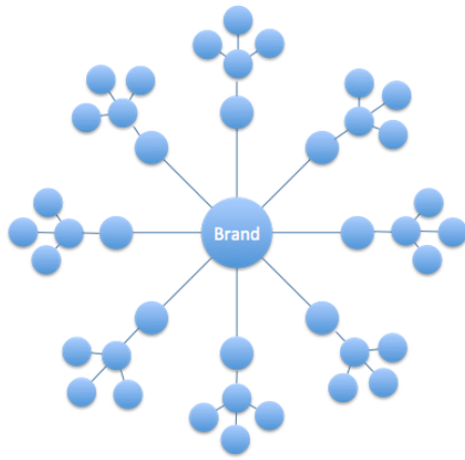


Figure 6. Influencer Brand. Highly personal with a high sense of belonging. Existing communities have strong links to the brand but not much interaction across their established communities.

Influencer brands are highly personal. This means that the identity of the individuals in this particular brand community is close to the identity of the brand. Therefore the individuals have a high sense of belonging to the brand. Existing communities of artists and designers have strong links to the Apple brand but not much interaction across their established communities. As Rogers (2003) explains, the transfer of ideas occurs most frequently between individuals who are similar and such communication is also more likely to be effective and thus to be rewarding to the participants. In other words, if I, a communications expert, try to dissolve something new to my community of communicators, assimilation is more probable than if I were to share the information with a community of computer engineers.

Influencer brands have found a representation of self that relates to the brand in other existing communities. Customers belonging in one community are not interacting much with other communities that share the same brand identity and therefore, their ability to change brand identity is not very strong. In this case, the brand is the leading influencer in identity creation. For example, Apple's customers often manifest a strong association with their favourite brand, but they do not interact much with each other in terms of the brand. It is a known fact that, if Apple makes a mistake, its customers will not make a

big fuss of it. Instead, they will try to hide or dilute the knowledge about it. This high loyalty comes from the fact that they strongly relate themselves with the brand, and any criticism towards Apple is taken as criticism towards the user. Apple emphasises fine industrial design, both hardware and software, that appeal to the designers, artists, and other creatives who appreciate aesthetics. This way, Apple is using the already existing communities, those of designers, artists etc. to strengthen its brand identity. This is an ingenious marketing strategy as usually artists, designers, and creatives are very influential people in society. Therefore, the influencer brand has a snowball effect.

Since in the beginning, Apple emphasised refined industrial design, both hardware and software, that appeal to the designers, artists, and other creatives who appreciate aesthetics. Therefore, their collective identity is part of the users' self-concept which derives from their knowledge of their membership of a community together with the value and emotional significance attached to that membership (Tajfel, 1982).

4.3.3. Lego

As a result of a partnership with MIT Media Labs, Lego launched Mindstorms in 1984 (Lego, 2020). With this technology, Lego's fans could program a tailored brick from a PC via a software application. Unexpectedly though, within weeks of the launch, the electronic brick had been reverse-engineered by a student at Stanford University, who posted all his findings on the Internet. This work initiated new discussion threads among users who were sharing information and showing off their inventions. (Ireland, et al., 2008, pp. C-127) This raised concerns about intellectual property rights, but Lego decided instead to observe the users' community rather than stop them. Mindstorms became very popular and interestingly; the most passionate users were adults, not children. Universities around the world started supporting Lego Mindstorms community and FIRST (a non-profit organization) created the FIRST Lego League, which organized tournaments at different levels. The management of Lego remained still suspicious of Mindstorms and cut off all marketing budget as a result, even though the product was selling out periodically over a period of six years. Mindstorms' yearly sales were roughly 40,000 units with a unit price of approximately \$250 all thanks to user

communities. Realising this, in 2006, the new Lego management decided to support and encourage the Mindstorms community from then on. (Ireland, et al., 2008, pp. C-127-C128)

Lego's case shows how customer communities can shift corporate identities to a whole new direction. Lego strongly projected themselves as the creative toy manufacturer for children. It was its enthusiastic adult community that gave Lego the unique identity that differentiated them from all their competition.

4.3.4. Lego as a Collective Brand

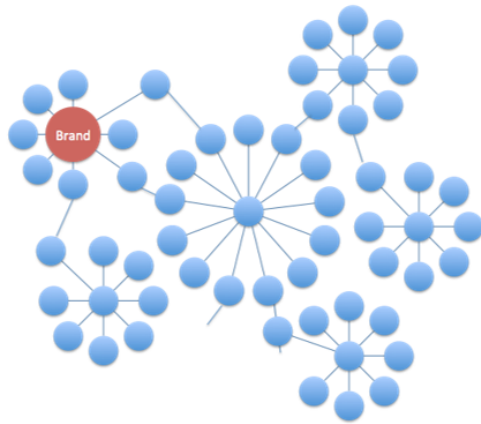


Figure 7. Collective Brand. Highly collective with a weak sense of belonging. Links between the brand and the customer community are weak.

Collective brand members are early adopters of innovations, and their community is a huge family with lots of interactions. Their communities are dedicated to the quality and support of everyone in it. They help each other get through both the good and the bad times. They teach and assist others in becoming better and protect each other from those who would seek to destroy those bonds. Every day they seek to go beyond the standards they have set while holding each other accountable for those standards. Gamer communities, for example, are made of creative people that interact densely, but once a new, more innovative game is introduced, they leave and reformat around the new.

Collective brands have a strong collective identity, but their customers are not very loyal as they do not identify themselves with the brand.

Lego is another type of collective brand as its customers are very active and creative, but once they find a new interest, they move on to the other brand of interest.

Brands with early adopter members must always innovate new things in order to keep their customers interested in the brand. Because of high customer interactions, collective brands can gather vast information about the customers' interests and character. Therefore they have the ability to evolve continuously and adapt to their needs. In fact, companies use this information to attract or build new communities for their games.

4.3.5. Wikipedia

Wikipedia, the wildly successful online encyclopaedia, gives a new notion for an organization. Founded in 2001 by Jimmy Wales and Larry Sanger, Wikipedia uses “the concept and technology of a wiki pioneered by Ward Cunningham”. Quickly, Wikipedia grew, and it became the world’s largest encyclopaedia in over 200 languages. Today Wikipedia includes over “15 million freely usable articles” and content from a million registered and countless anonymous contributors. (Wikipedia, 2020)

O’Sullivan (2009) suggests that Wikipedia is different in three ways:

- 1) It operates completely by ordinary people
- 2) It is non-proprietary and free for all to use
- 3) It is run by an anonymous group of people. (O'Sullivan, 2009, p. 1)

Throughout time, we are taught about individual heroes and leaders and that only they can organize people and have a vision that drives groups to achieve goals. As O’Sullivan (2009) notes, we seem to have an addiction to heroes, and the myth of rugged individualism strikes a powerful chord in the Western psyche, aided and abetted by a consumer society that operates on the bases of anonymity individuals. In the

contrary, Wikipedia is driven by the open-source movement and a sharing economy often facilitated by a community-based online platform.

4.3.6. Wikipedia as a Collaborative Brand

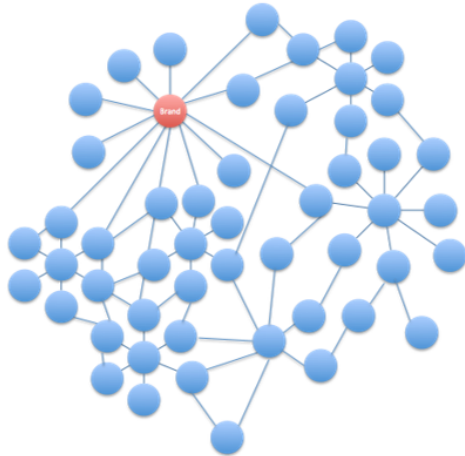


Figure 8. Collaborative Brand. Highly collective with a high sense of belonging. Strong communities of highly loyal customers.

Schuman & Twombly (2009) worked with Global 100 companies, governments, and start-ups. During the ten years of consulting and doing hands-on research, they found that collaborative communities are “dynamic, fit for purpose structure” and have the ability to adjust as the purpose and context of the community evolves (Shuman & Twombly, 2009). Collaborative brands are evolving continuously because their innovations are reshaped continuously within the community through interactions.

Wikipedia is an excellent example of what can be achieved through collaboration. Collaborative communities such as Wikipedia thrive because they have very strong fundamentals based on members’ own identity and leadership. Members of these communities usually have a sense of moral responsibility or obligation to the community (Muniz & O’Guinn, 2001). Brands with collaborative communities have

loyal customers who are connected with the brand beyond the need for their products. Such communities are seen in collaborative software or application development, such as Linux, Android and WordPress plugins.

Like Wikipedia, Android and Linux are open source development environments that, according to Wikipedia, are broad-reaching movements of individuals who “support the use of open-source licences for some or all software”. Open source movement is an excellent example of collaborative communities. Schuman and Twombly (2001) define a collaborative network as “the collection of businesses, individuals and other organisational entities that possess the capabilities and resources needed to achieve a specific outcome”.

4.3.7. Yahoo!

Yahoo! was founded in 1994. The company grew extremely fast during the 1990s and diversified into a major web portal, followed by numerous high-profile acquisitions. “The company's stock price skyrocketed during the dot-com bubble and closed at an all-time high of USD 118.75 in 2000. After the dot-com bubble burst, Yahoo! “reached an all-time low of USD 8.11 in 2001.” (Wikipedia, 2020) Since then, Yahoo has not recovered its value and has kept losing market share to Google. Why did this happen?

According to John Phileas (2017), a senior writer for Quora, Yahoo! tried to fulfil all the nodes of the Internet “tree”. Yahoo Sports, Yahoo Finance became huge properties but, as generalists, they could not keep up with specialists in each node. Their customer base churned as more sophisticated users moved on to newer products which made it even riskier for Yahoo! to change. Instead of catering to the leading edge, they had to cater to those who stayed. That meant they were moving backwards through the internet adoption cycle: from catering to innovators to catering to adopters, to early majority, late majority and finally laggards. That is how they got the reputation of being technologically behind. (Phileas, 2017)

4.3.8. Yahoo! as an Outlier Brand

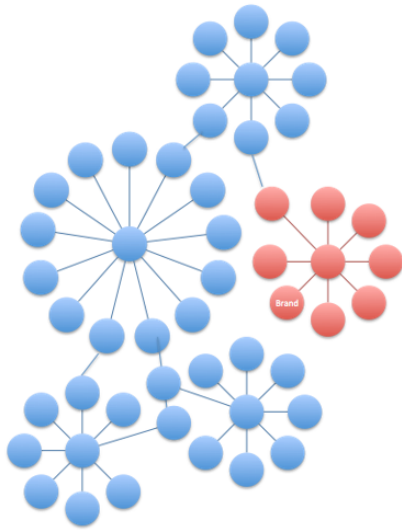


Figure 9. Outlier Brand. Highly personal with a low sense of belonging. Small communities of not highly loyal customers.

Some companies are just starting up their business, and the innovation dissolving has not happened yet. Therefore, they remain in the outlier nodes of their communities. Once innovation or information assimilation happens, they will have the opportunity to gather audiences who will create brand communities or penetrate already existing communities. Some companies lose their communities because of a lack of innovation. For example, Yahoo has steadily lost brand value with the latest innovations from Google and social media such as Facebook.

It is a good thing for brand communications and marketing to know whether their customer community is weak and not much interested in the brand. If the organisation fails to change, in the long-term, effects can result in a lack of loyalty and decreased market share. Most companies regard their brand identity as a facade and created by one-way communication, from the brand to the customer. However, this approach may give them short-term gains, but it is rarely sustainable in itself long-term. A brand is a collectively held idea of a company by its customers' reaction to the messages the company sends via advertising, product design and public relations.

A better understanding of the motivation and the nature of the customer communities can help understand the impact they have on your brand every day. Targeting the needs of a single customer group, e.g. the high-value customers does not necessarily work because these may not be as valuable for the customer community, therefore, lacking the influence needed for diffusion. According to Ouwersloot & Odekerken-Schröder (2008), communicators and marketers need to understand the motivators for customers joining and leaving their brand communities and can utilise the community knowledge to nourish the communities that help them strengthen their brand identity.

5. METHOD

This research project is driven by my interest in understanding the ways in which brand communities and people in general impact brand identity creation. The purpose is to create a model for studying different types of collective identities of brands. I focused on studying the existing literature from different fields that considered the communities in general and brand communities in particular. Social studies usually focused on qualitative methods of research and natural studies on data analytics. Looking at the natural sciences was also crucial for my model creation as they offered proof that there are patterns on how communities are organised. I then used case studies combined with secondary data to answer the first research question:

Question 1: What model can we use for studying collective brand identity?

In the empirical study, I will use primary data to prove whether the model and its characteristics can be applied in selected brands, answering the second research question:

Question 2: Can the model be used in practice to group and study brands?

5.1. A qualitative approach

I chose a qualitative method to conduct a set of interviews analysing the data against the model of Collective Brand Identity I have constructed. I found this method to be the most suitable way to study the new model within the scope of this thesis. As part of my empirical research, I conduct four interviews with communicators from different brands and discuss the results, testing the model's validity. When selecting the companies for the interviews, I tried to sample representatives of the 4 types of brands that I discuss in the Collective Brand Identity model. The framework for sampling was to find brands within the following characteristics:

- i. Influencer Brand with the following characteristics:**
 - a. Highly personal
 - b. High sense of belonging
 - c. Already existing communities have strong links to the brand
 - d. Lack of interaction across their established brand communities.
- ii. Collaborative Brand with the following characteristics:**
 - a. Highly collective
 - b. High sense of belonging
 - c. Strong communities of highly loyal members
 - d. High level of interaction between the brand community members
- iii. Collective Brand with the following characteristics:**
 - a. Highly collective
 - b. Low sense of belonging
 - c. Links between the brand and the community are weak
 - d. High level of interaction between the brand community members
- iv. Outlier Brand with the following characteristics:**
 - a. Highly personal
 - b. Low sense of belonging
 - c. Links between the brand and the community are weak
 - d. New or Small communities, or both

Based on the above descriptions of each brand type, I have identified the following four characteristics for comparison:

- 1) Collective vs Personal identity
- 2) Sense of belonging, high vs low
- 3) The strength of links between the brand and the community
- 4) Level of interaction amongst brand community members

However, since the new model of Collective Brand Identity would need a more extensive empirical study in order to become more refined and useful in practice, I did not try to include specific requirements in the sample of the companies I selected for the interviews. I nevertheless picked as varied a sample and as different from each other

as possible. I interviewed a community brand, a non-profit organisation, a software company, as well as a services' company. I interviewed either the communications or the person responsible for marketing in these organisations. They were the ones who, because of the nature of their work, can best explain how these brands communicate with their customers and other stakeholders.

In order to simplify the data collected from the interviews I also used data reduction method through coding, arranging the information into a table in order to group similar characteristics of the brands I interviewed (William, 2018, p. 150). For simplicity, I used colour coding for each of the characteristics highlighting with a different colour similar characteristics in each of the interview transcripts.

5.1.1. Interview Questions

I composed a questionnaire with open format questions for the communicators in the four organisations to collect further information for improving my model. According to William (2018), the open format questions allow the interviewees more freedom for elaborating their answers and has less bias though they are more demanding to analyse (William, 2018, pp. 111-112).

The interviews were semi-structured. They were based on a set of standard questions, but I also allowed the interviewees to expand beyond strictly answering the questions and therefore, to expand the qualitative data collection. I also expanded on the questions when they were not correctly understood or when I saw an opportunity to gather more relevant data for my research. The interview questions were the same for all the people I interviewed. The questionnaire can be found in **Appendix 1**.

5.1.2. Data collection and transcription

I conducted three out of the four interviews personally and face-to-face. I recorded the full interviews and transcribed them afterwards by listening to the recordings and transcribing. I transcribed the information word by word. However, I excluded small

talk which was not part of the interviews and explanations of the questions when they were not understood. I have saved the original recordings as well as transcriptions, and I can retract them when needed. The fourth interview was done over email, which I have also saved in my archives. A few of the interviews were conducted already in 2015; hence the situation for these brands and the positions of the interviewees might have changed. This is also the reason that I am not analysing the data on social media since a lot has happened in this area since 2015.

5.2. Analysis of the Interviews based on the model

In this section, I will focus on analysing the empirical data from the interviews. This is the final step of my research. The first step was to review the literature and to build a conceptual model for the Collective Brand Identity. The second step was to look into real-life cases of collective identities of brands that fit into the four dimensions of the new model. As the third and final step, I have conducted four interviews to find out whether these selected brands can be categorised according to the four dimensions of the Collective Brand Identity model. These interviews serve as a proof of concept. Even though not within the scope of this thesis, a larger sample and more interviews need to be conducted in order to support and improve the Collective Brand Identity model. This is subject to future studies. The interview questionnaire can be viewed in **Appendix 1**.

5.2.1. The study object

My empirical research sample consisted of the following brands and interviewees:

The Restaurant Day was initially started by a group of Helsinki-based restaurateurs and foodies. It is today the largest food carnival in the world, created by thousands of people organising and visiting one-day restaurants in over 30 countries around the world. The event is facilitated by a team of volunteers who also maintain the website. All restaurateurs are personally responsible for all actions related to running their restaurants. The interview was conducted in 2015 with Kati Tammisto, a member of the core team who organised and maintained the web site for the event in Helsinki.

Wikimedia Finland is a group of people dedicated to further use and development of different products initially developed by Wikimedia Foundation in California.

Wikimedia is categorised as a collaborative brand in the case study section. Given the opportunity of this interview, I wanted to find out whether the same principles of a collaborative brand applied to the Finnish chapter. I interviewed Tommi Kovala in 2015. At that time, he was the chairman of Wikimedia Finland which is a local chapter in the Wikimedia movement.

The Logistics Optimisation Company (LOC) wanted to remain anonymous; therefore, I am not using the real name here. The company is a solution and service provider for retailers helping them optimise shelf space in retail outlets. I interviewed in 2015, the Marketing and Communications Director responsible for external communications towards the customers and other stakeholders. The Marketing and Communications Director had been with the company for over three years.

MagiCAD Group is a software company that offers Building Information Modelling (BIM) software to engineering design companies. Their software works as a plugin for Autodesk Revit and AutoCAD platforms, enhancing the capability of these platforms for the specific needs of Mechanical, Electrical and Plumbing (MEP) designers. According to MagiCAD, their software is used by thousands of companies in over 80 countries around the world for designing and calculating MEP systems (MagiCAD, 2020).

I interviewed Tia Jokinen, Marketing Campaigns and Graphic Design Specialist at MagiCAD Group in 2020. As part of the global marketing team, one of Jokinen's responsibilities is to plan and coordinate marketing campaigns in cooperation with the rest of the marketing team. She also designs customer newsletters for multiple markets and is the company's graphic designer.

5.2.2. Collective vs Personal identity

One of the dimensions of the Collective Brand Identity is how much the identity of the brand is part of the individuals' own identity, for example, a person saying "I am an iPhone person". Customers of highly personal brands identify themselves with the brand, and therefore, they are very loyal to the brand. In the case study section, Apple was characterised as highly personal.

To the other end of this dimension, the cause or the purpose of the community takes far greater significance than the individual's needs to be associated with the brand like in the example of the Lego community in the case studies. The communities' innate love and curiosity for creating and for building things brought them close to the brand. The loyalty, therefore, is not to the brand but to the value it brings to its customers' passion. In the case of Yahoo!, the user community stood by as long as the company brought value to their already existing interests. When another provider did this better, the users moved on. The outlier brands seem to be prone to losing their communities because they do not share some of the same values.

Restaurant Day shares many similarities with Lego in the case study example. For the Restaurant Day, being collective though is the focal point of the brand:

"It is a participatory thing, a communal activity ... So, it has to be like what the users are and what the creators, which are the restaurateurs, how they want it to look like," Kati Tammisto.

Initially, the Restaurant Day seemed to have hit the mark when acting upon common values with the community of restaurateurs and foodies, first in Helsinki and then in other cities around the world. The founders, restaurateurs themselves, started the Restaurant Day as a movement in contrast to the rules and regulations which hindered their passion for food and entrepreneurship:

"It was founded by three friends who had some experience in keeping a restaurant, and they just thought that it should be easier to put up a restaurant in Helsinki or elsewhere in Finland because there are quite many rules and regulations and legislation restricting what you can make. And then, they just

came up with this idea that yes, let's call a day when everyone can just make a restaurant just for one day and let's just forget all the rules and people can do what they want," Kati Tammisto.

For the restaurateurs, the Restaurant Day as a brand is not the main reason why they participate in the movement; instead, it is because of their shared passion for food. This group of people would, like the Lego community, care much for the possibilities that the brand offers to them in terms of practising and growing their passion. As Hatch & Schultz (2008) explain "self-concept towards the brand is collective".

When asked what she thinks the participants of the Restaurant Day value in general, Tammisto answered:

"I think the feeling ... Also the social part, really the communal feeling plays quite a big role. For example, many people have said that it's the first time that people have been sitting in the same table with a stranger and have dinner in a Restaurant Day evening. I've been visiting strangers homes for a restaurant day, and that's something you can't really do otherwise. There was this Peruvian food that I had in one lady's home, and there were a lot of Japanese people inside. They were really excited. So I think this is what really makes the restaurant day feel."

In addition to the shared love for food, Restaurant Day brings people together because it meets some basic human needs like the need to be social and interact with one another. Also, this could be seen as a value that characterises a sub-community because there are people who prepare the food and others who consume it.

Similarly, for Wikimedia Finland, the shared values such as the ideas that "knowledge needs to be free for everyone and openness" are combined with other strong social motivators. In the case of Wikipedia Finland, it is the need to be seen and understood as the experts who write the Wikipedia articles collaborate efficiently with each other in order to produce high quality and accurate content. As Tommi Kovala explains:

“Because even though it’s open, one of the important things that I have to communicate is that even though anyone can edit it, they don’t accept just anything. So, to say that there is no practical barrier to entry, the bar is still quite high in some cases on what you can add to something. If I look at quite an established article and I say to someone, ok, if you find an error in it, you can go ahead and edit it but don't be surprised if someone asked you to post citation sources and stuff because like the Finnish version of Wikipedia is already quite advanced ... So, this is one of the things that the quality and the low barrier for entry they go hand in hand.” Tommi Kovala.

As illustrated above, the main difference between Wikipedia Finland and The Restaurant Day, as well as, the other two brands I interviewed is the innate collaboration between Wikipedia members to improve and make the Wikipedia ‘product’ the best possible.

For LOC and MagiCAD, the main collaboration is between the brands and the customers who correspond with the personal brand type in the Collective Brand Identity model. Even though there are no good cues from the interview with the Marketing and Communications Director at LOC that there is a true collaboration between the brand and the customers, I would like to explore this aspect of the brand further in the future. The reason for this is connected to the comment that the Marketing and Communications Director made in the interview that they “have not lost even a single customer and the company has been running now for more than ten years”. I did not realise at the time of the interview that this was a cue for asking further information about this subject because it signalled towards high brand loyalty. This was somehow surprising because, throughout the interview, there was no strong connection through values giving the impression of a typical outlier brand. Unlike the three other interviews, the customers of LOC do not relate to each-other nor the brand other than for the sole purpose of business gain or at least, these were not identified during the interview. Mainly, the company keeps regular formal interaction with the customers through industry events and the logistics and supply chain organisation in Finland LOGY. In general, it seems that there is a customer community (LOGY) but more

needs to be explored with regards to the relationship between LOC and LOGY, for example.

MagiCAD however, seems to have a higher level of collaboration between the brand and the customers since customers participate actively in product development:

“We also listen to our customers generally carefully; we take feature requests and market-specific local needs into consideration all the time – then when these are implemented, we, of course, promote them,” Tia Jokinen.

Unlike the Restaurant Day members and LOC customers, MagiCAD’s customers also seem to associate the brand with their own professional identity, so in general, MagiCAD seems to be a personal brand type. When asked about what keeps your customers loyal to your brand, Jokinen answered:

“Our very specialized and professional software(s); our very detailed manufacturer verified BIM objects; own professional modelling services and our good customer service (we have very loyal customers generally and close relationships with them),” Tia Jokinen.

5.2.3. Sense of belonging

As Noël, et al. (2008) point out, the members of the brand community share common interest and passion or even love for a brand. When people identify or feel that they are part of the brand community, they can be classified as brand community members (Zaglia, 2013). In this section, I will examine how strong is the sense of belonging in the brand communities for the organisations I interviewed.

MagiCAD’s customers seem to be happy to associate themselves with the brand by giving testimonials and spreading a positive word of mouth. The company has over 60 case studies and customer references on their web pages (www.magicad.com), for example. In the interview with Tia Jokinen at MagiCAD, this sense of belonging and association with the brand was revealed when I asked about what does she think the customers' value in general:

“They value super professional, comprehensive, and reliable software (the top one in the field), skilled and helpful service, high-quality BIM objects, attention to the details,” Tia Jokinen.

There is an association with the customers' sense of professionalism for themselves and their sense of association with a professional brand. This could be understood that the more skilled and professional the customer is, the more likely they are to feel a sense of belonging to the brand. Also, a customer who aspires to become more skilled and professional would also like to associate themselves with the MagiCAD brand. It is, therefore, worth knowing this for the brand in order to nurture this value among the brand community. Also, this value can expand throughout the organisation, not just marketing and communications. For example, this is valuable knowledge for the product development, customer services and the sales team.

When Marketing and Communications Director from LOC was asked about the same question, the answer was:

“Return on investments so, the results and the process of taking it into the use. How the implementation is done,” Marketing and Communications Director.

LOC has not yet found the value behind the return on investment or ROI. The answer to why ROI is important for the customers is crucial in this case. There can be many answers to this question, and these are such questions that need to be explored because the reasons can be so crucial for the brand identity. Not knowing why the customers have a sense of belonging to your brand can inhibit you from connecting with your customers based on values and hence hinder the opportunity to be able to nurture and grow your brand community.

In the case of the restaurant Day, interview examples show a low sense of belonging to the brand. The sense of belonging is instead towards the values themselves. When asked about The Restaurant Day's brand cornerstones, Tammisto answered:

“... It's probably the idea that it develops according to what people sort of want it to be,” Kati Tammisto.

As described in the following answer about how values are changing over time, it is clear that the community moulds the values of the brand. This is something observed in the case study of Lego as well. It seems that for the collective brands, values of the community itself dominate the brand and what it will become in the future.

“I think that, as it gets bigger (the Restaurant Day), and also it has to do with the frequency - because it's held quite often (four times a year), that sort of brings in more people that have different targets. Sort of also financial targets. That's something that is quite much against the Restaurant Day original values, unfortunately. But I'm still very happy that there are places where they deliver the true values and there are more and more Restaurant Days kept outside Finland and in more new countries.” Kati Tammisto.

The collective brands seem to be more versatile and changing over time than the influencer or collaborative ones which have a more decisive stand behind the values. Collective brands, as in the example above, might also be more vulnerable from their original values being taken over and being replaced.

In the interview with Wikimedia Finland, the high sense of belonging to the brand's values and own personal values are interlinked with the sense of responsibility and action-taking. The lack of hierarchical levels enables the community members to take leading roles based on their object of interest. This is explained well by Tommi Kovala during the interview:

“I think that people have that inner tendency to form hierarchies. I think it has something to do with basic human nature. If you take personal responsibility every time, it can be some time mentally very tiring so sometimes it is easier to differ to someone else and to think that, ok, maybe he or she will do this, maybe she will take charge of this thing. But I noticed that this offends to the diffusion of responsibility and to the alienation of the rest of what is going on in the community. I think that when you actively try to keep to the hierarchies as horizontal as possible, it is also empowering because you know that you can take the initiative on your own and can have a meaningful impact even though

you have no title. We try to work on them with little things like everyone is welcome to our board meetings. They are not closed.” Tommi Kovala.

5.2.4. The strength of links between the brand and the community

When asked about the brand cornerstones of the Restaurant Day, Kati Tammisto answered:

“We don't want to keep the ropes too tightly with us. It is a participatory thing, a communal activity so, it has to be like what the users are and what the creators, which are the restaurateurs, want it to look like.” Kati Tammisto.

Strong, independent communities are fundamental for collective and collaborative brand types. However, they differ in that collaborative brand communities have shared values and strong loyalty to the brand. The Restaurant Day community tends to be more collective than collaborative as the values of the community differ, and a division in sub-communities is also observed. As Restaurant Day grows, the brand's values evolve with the new members of the community according to Tammisto.

The original values may remain, but new values are also added as the community grows as Tammisto states:

“I'm still very happy that there are places where they deliver the true values as there are more and more Restaurant Days kept outside Finland and in more new countries,” Kati Tammisto.

The Restaurant Day members and customers are more of a curious and social crowd, interested in different kinds of food experiences rather than driven by the originating values of the Restaurant Day which carry a bit of anarchism. While some of these new values and traditions are not what the founders originally hoped for, many are an extension of the original ones and even positively unexpected:

“ ... many people have said that Restaurant Day is the first time that people have been sitting in the same table with a stranger and have had dinner. People are

visiting strangers homes for a restaurant day, and that's something one cannot experience otherwise." Kati Tammisto.

The collaborative and influencer brands have stronger links with their brand communities. The difference is in the intensity of collaborative efforts within collaborative brands. In Wikimedia Finland, for example, there are contributors who create new articles, others who check the articles' accuracy and quality, some who recruit new contributors and some who take care of accounting and communications. Topics also vary as expected for the world's largest encyclopaedia. These create sub-communities of people with similar interests. Even with this vast diversity, Wikimedia remains whole. In contrast to the sub-communities around Wikimedia, a brand like Restaurant Day has sparked the formation of extended communities around the core idea of the brand. Kati Tammisto explained in the interview that, The Restaurant Day has sparked other communal activities, for example, Päivien Päivä (Day of Days) and then Siivous Päivä (Cleaning Day) and all other Päivä-s (Days) that started afterwards and took example on some of the Restaurant Day originating values. It can be argued that because of the loose links between the brand and the community, it is easy for members of the community to separate and form similar brands and new communities around them sharing some of the values of the original brand.

I was not able to gain enough insight from the interviews with MagiCAD and LOC in order to understand the particular characteristic of the Collective Brand Identity which is the strength of brand community links. However, the interviewees' answers suggest strong individual links between the brand and LOC and MagiCAD's customers. A new set of questions is needed to better understand the strength of links between the community members themselves probably by interviewing a selected sample of customers of these brands. This was not possible within the scope of this study, and MagiCAD and LOC did not have this information available during the course of the interviews.

5.2.5. Level of interaction amongst brand community members

Two of the four brands I interviewed demonstrated a high level of interaction between the brand and the customer community. These were Wikimedia Finland and MagiCAD. In both organisations, the interaction is incorporated into product development. However, for Wikimedia the product development is done by the community itself while at MagiCAD, it is the interaction between the customer community and the product development team.

Wikimedia Finland is also comprised of sub-communities surrounding different topics of interest, and most of the interaction is between the voluntary contributors rather than the brand and the contributors:

“For most of the part, they focus on different areas - most have one major love on Wikipedia. It can be something like infectious diseases or old trains or aeroplanes or Russian geography or anything like that but, when they start contributing their free time to something, then they develop an emotional connection to it. And, I think that some of the most vocal disagreements and fights in Wikipedia take part because people are emotionally invested to it. And their loyalty is not mainly to the community; their loyalty is more to the abstract idea of developing their focus area on Wikipedia to the point where it's a high-quality encyclopaedia on that subject. So, a bit like a medieval monk in that sense. A lot of people have this attitude, I've noticed.” Tommi Kovala.

As in the case study examples, the difference between the influencer brand and the collaborative brand is in the level of collaboration between the community members. In the case of Apple, there was not a lot of interaction and collaboration between the members of the community themselves. Unlike Wikimedia, they were not developing the products together in collaboration and hence did not have the same high impact in Apple's brand identity evolution other than being the “face” of the brand. It is not to say that the Influencer brand community does not have an impact on brand identity since this is a very personal brand. So it carries the identity of the people it chooses as its customers. For MagiCAD, the community is more involved with what the product of

the future will look like and therefore, customers have a stronger impact in shaping the brand's future identity.

The other two brands interviewed interacted, either less with the community or on a more cordial level. For example, at LOC, the customer is treated "as a friend" so the interaction is more personal and on a one-on-one basis. This may explain the reason for strong customer loyalty in some of the outlier brands. These brands are not collective, but their connections with individual customers are substantial. It is essential to notice that for some start-ups and highly specialised business-to-business brands, the outlier can be a successful strategy. For example, LOC is a small provider of highly complex solutions, and they need to focus on one customer at a time in order to offer tailored and long-term solutions to them. An outlier brand can, therefore be a strategy for the particular situation the brand finds itself. Yahoo! on the other hand, grew very fast and needed a strategy in order to get out of the outlier position because they could not afford anymore to keep a personal interaction with their customers.

Similarly, when I asked Kati Tammisto whether people participating in the Restaurant Day have a strong interaction between each other and the brand, she replied: "that would be good, but they don't have any channel." For Tammisto, more interaction amongst the people in the community of restaurateurs and with the brand is something that they are aspiring to. It seems that there is the aspiration for this collective brand to become more collaborative:

"I would love to organise a regular Restaurant Day restauranters events or make a community for them. That would also be a good forum for them to exchange opinions and ideas with each other ... I think that would be important and I think that they really deserve that and I would like to give that to them because I think that inspires you and makes you keep doing that. It would also be nicer that even before the restaurant day to be able to really invite them into the community. Yes. I have a lot of ideas." Kati Tammisto.

5.2.6. Social Media enabling digital communities

I wanted to take into consideration the social media when analysing brand communities as this is a relatively new phenomenon which has taken off in the recent 15 years. It has impacted the way how we communicate with each other, share information and collaborate. The interview with Wikimedia Finland brings light on how these digital communities form and interact online as a result.

“A lot of the discussion happens on the talk pages of the individual users ... We have members in the association who work with social media professionals or are semi-professionally, and they’ve been a great help in taking a look at what is the most efficient channel for reaching people.” Tommi Kovala.

Another interesting aspect of Wikimedia is that it does not have a strong visual identity, and yet it is one of the most well-known brands we know.

“Our pages don't look like a brand,” says Kovala. “Our main purpose with Facebook and Twitter is to use them as bulletin boards on our activities, so we try to reach out to people, and when we have some activities, like when we have events, we use Facebook to promote them and make it easy for people to join in.”

In addition to the contributor community, Wikimedia is also keeping an eye on the millions of users that visit their Wiki pages. They take metrics from Facebook and Twitter pages as well as the blog. Further data on social media and how they facilitate digital brand communities needs to be considered in future studies.

5.2.7. Some challenges within the Collaborative and Collective brands

These brands are not able to steer their communities into the direction they want since the communities are powerful:

“Nowadays people share a lot of photos, and they can take videos, and they can only take the negative examples which then they tell forward commenting that

they had really bad food and they were charged 10 € for it. That, of course, impacts quite heavily what people think about Restaurant Day but then again, if people see a nice video that one of their friends posted on Instagram on a nice restaurant, that might be really positive.” Kati Tammisto.

According to Tammisto, as the restaurant Day gets bigger, it is also more challenging to stick to the originating values. The original values stay, but new values are added as the community grows as Tammisto states, “I’m still very happy that there are places where they deliver the true values as there are more and more Restaurant Days kept outside Finland and in more new countries.”

For Wikipedia Finland the concern is mostly related to the topics coverage and gender gap of the contributors:

“ ... I very often come to the preconception that technology topics and topics exploiting the bar science are over-represented there because of the user base and to a large degree this is true too. And the simple fact that it seems to be a boys’ club - this stereotype holds true to a certain extent ... There is a massive gender gap still in place, and the foundation realises it thus has an active effort to focus on doing something for the problem, but I’ve noticed that a lot of these Wikipedians who think that they should do something about it they start not by recruiting from the underrepresented demographics rather they look at what fields are neglected.” Tommi Kovala.

6. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

People interacting with each other in their communities give an identity to brands—a collective identity—that may be different from the one that corporate communications are trying to project to them. Social interactions amongst specialised communities of the admirers of the brand form so-called "brand communities" (Muniz & O'Guinn, 2001). Most of the literature I reviewed in my theory section, however, looked at the corporate identity as something that is shaped by corporate communications through communication strategies, consistent visual branding and messages towards the stakeholders. By doing so, they miss entirely the role that the brands' customers, fans, and contributors play collectively in the formation of the brand identity. Through the case studies and interviews, this study has shown that such concepts of top-down corporate identity do not work very well. It has demonstrated that customers and other stakeholders can shape how we see brands and also can have a substantial impact on product development and therefore, the future of brands. This is why I have developed a new model for brand identity formation that sees identity-forming from many interactions between the brand and its community or communities. I have called this Collective Brand Identity. My first research question was:

Question 1: What model can we use for studying collective brand identity?

I constructed the Collective Identity Model based on literature about social interactions of people and communities. I found the most valuable and I relied mainly on research from the fields of social sciences, psychology and natural sciences. I also looked at some practical and historical case studies of brand identity experiences of Apple, Lego, Wikipedia and Yahoo! for illustrating and explaining the model further.

I have identified four main types of collective identities based on the community characteristics and personal sense of belonging. These brands are Influencer, Collaborative, Collective and Outlier. I summarise the characteristics of each brand type in the Figure 10.

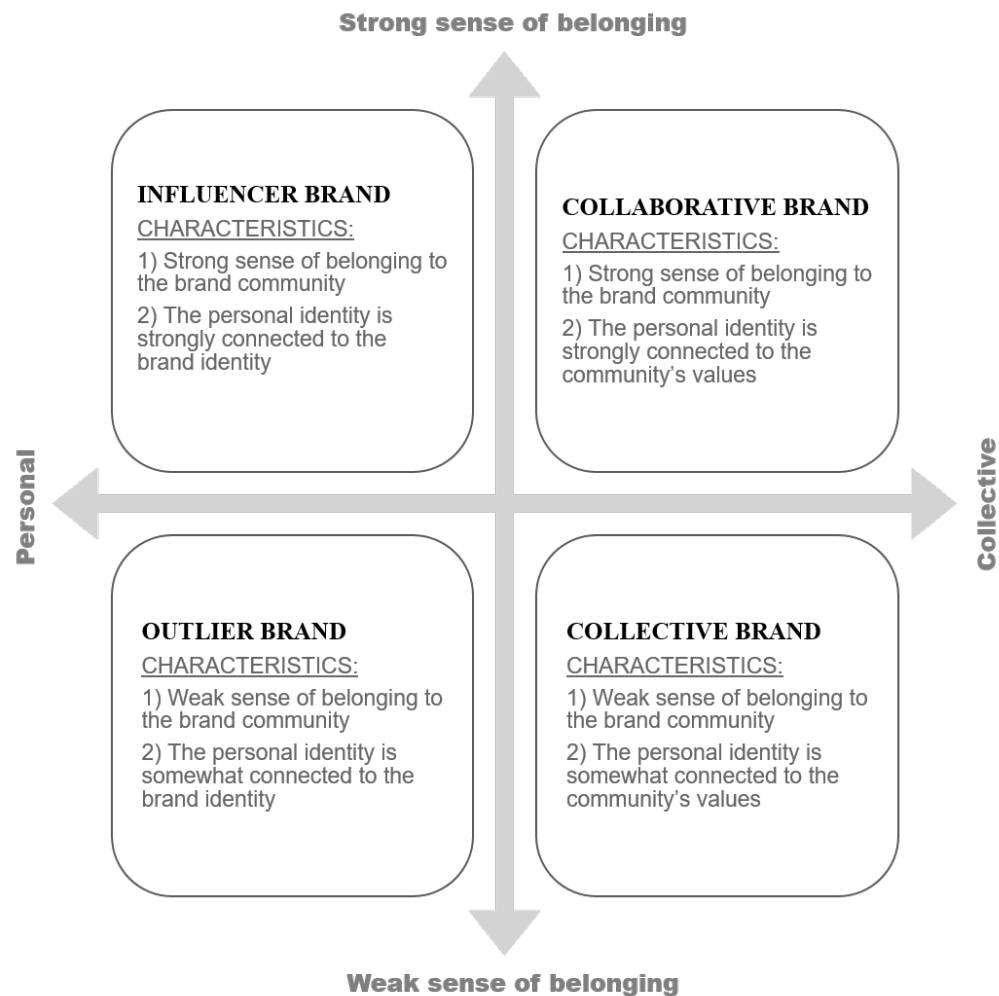


Figure 10. Characteristics of Collective Brand Identity

Influencer Brand is characterised by a high sense of belonging to the brand community, and the personal identity of the individuals within the brand community is strongly connected to the brand's identity. The collective identity is weak, and customers do not contribute to identity creation, nor is there much interaction between members. Examples: Apple, Hush Puppies, Adobe.

Collaborative Brand is characterised by a high sense of belonging to the brand community, and the personal identity of the individuals within the brand community is strongly connected to the communities values. Strong communities of highly loyal customers usually encountered as non-profit organisations around a good cause, e.g. Wikipedia, Creative Commons, Greenpeace.

Collective Brand is characterised by low sense of belonging to the brand community, and the personal identity of members is somewhat connected to the community's values. People interested in new things such as games and social networking create strong brand communities with impact on brand identity. E.g. Lego, Facebook, Minecraft.

Outlier Brand is characterised by a low sense of belonging to the brand community, and the personal identity of members is somewhat connected to the brand identity. Communities are still unformed or weak. E.g. some start-ups and brands providing basic goods like food or heating.

In the previous chapter, I examined my empirical data based on my model for Collective Brand Identity in order to answer my second research question:

Question 2: Can the model be used in practice to group and study brands?

I chose a qualitative method to conduct a set of interviews analysing the data against the model of Collective Identity of Brands I have built. When selecting the companies for the interviews, I tried to sample representatives of the four types of brands that I discuss in the model. The key findings from the four interviews are summarised in Figure 11. They demonstrate how the model can be used to group and study brands' collective identity. The interviews and their analysis serve as proof for the usability of the model, answering the second research question.

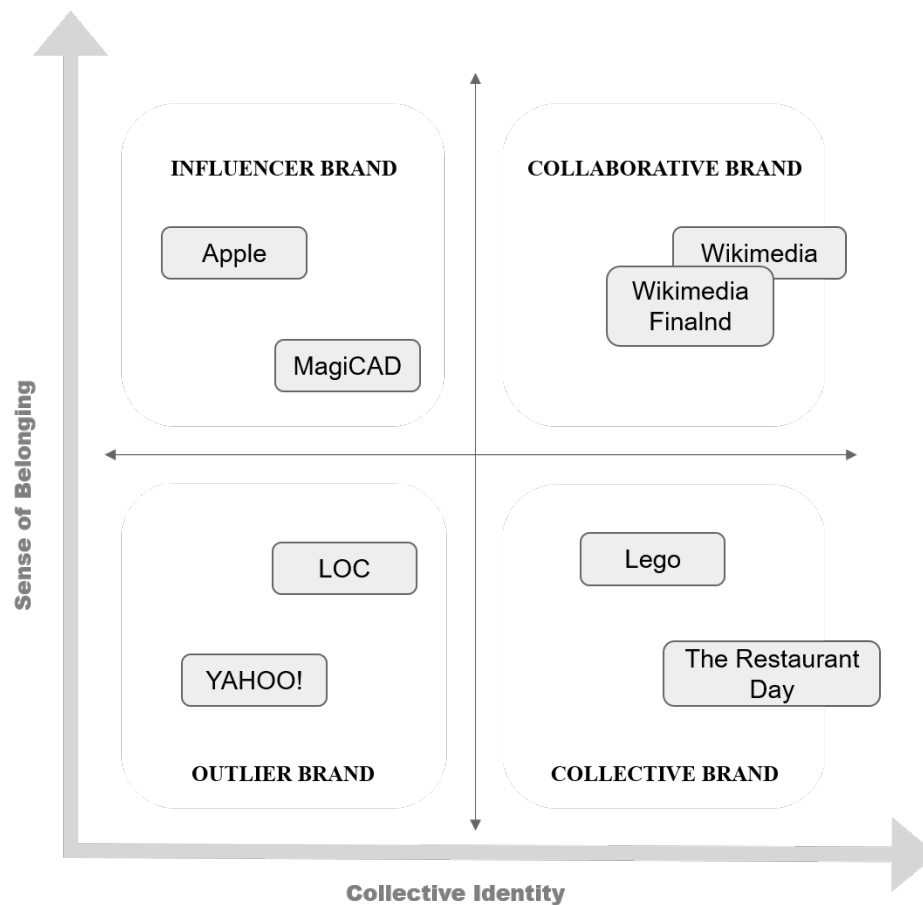


Figure 11. Collective Identities of different brands

This thesis has offered a new method for studying the identity of brands and also offered some insight into how different types of brands behave, revealing some tactics and strategies that brands can use for change. For example, in the interview with Kati Tammisto from the collective brand, Restaurant Day, she explained that they aspire to become more collaborative. The characteristics of a Collaborative brand in this study offer some cues for what needs to change in the behaviour of the Restaurant Day in order for them to offer an environment for better collaboration within their community.

Similarly, the interview with Tommi Kovala from the collaborative brand, Wikimedia Finland, shows that they want to become more influential. An example of this is that they would like to make the community more inclusive towards women, especially those in humanistic sciences. Influencer brand characteristics can offer some insight for

realising this aspiration by trying to find out what the identity of women in humanistic sciences has in common with Wikipedia's values.

Offering tools for the brands and their communities in order to reach their ambitions would be a goal for future research. This would require more qualitative interviews and refinement of the interview questions as part of the process. As William explains (2018, p. 148), the research process continues with the refinement of the questions and additional interviews until enough data is collected to support the created model. My research on finding proof and characteristics of brand types in the Collective Brand Identity model is at a very early phase. My research questionnaire was formulated on the initial model framework; therefore, I formulated a very broad set of questions in order to collect as much information as possible on the topic. For future research "repeated bursts of data collection" would be needed (William, 2018, p. 148) while refining further the questions and collect new data from a larger sample in order to improve the empirical evidence as well as the model of Collective Brand Identity itself. This strategy would make it possible to use the Model as a tool for brands to work with and to move towards the direction they intend for the future of their brand identity.

The results of the interview analysis and this study mean that we can look at the brand identity from the collective identity perspective. This is important because we live in an era of vast transparency of communication we have never seen before. Digitalisation, the Internet and social media have unveiled as well as facilitated interaction between these brand communities with easy access to each other and the brands themselves. Through blogs, YouTube, Facebook, Instagram and Twitter, the voice of the users can be as strong as or more potent than the voice of a major newspaper or magazine. As a result, controlling a consistent message has become a much more significant challenge for companies than ever before. One of the limitations of this study is that it did not draw enough results on the role of the digital economy and social media in the brand identity. I conducted most of my interviews in 2015, and by the time of the completion of my study in 2020, a lot had changed with regards to social media. Future research in this area would need to conduct further empirical research to consider social media in light of the Collective Brand Identity model. More specifically, I would like to consider

the points made in the Situation Analysis chapter, where I discussed the impact of Social Media in brand communications. Social Media has impacted brands and corporate communications, mainly in these three ways:

- 1) Flourishing digital communities increase transparency and brand vulnerability. The social web has revealed surprising facts about what people think about brands and how they are linked to different communities.
- 2) Social media offers a growth opportunity for brands to nurture and broaden customer communities. Most companies are engaging with their audiences in social media which has become a place for brands to meet their target audience and build relationships.
- 3) A challenge for marketing and communications is how to effectively measure the return on investment (ROI) on social media programs. As brands are investing more and more on social media as a channel of communication with their customers, communicators need to make the business case and offer proof that the social media program is making a positive impact on business.

Brands today are dependant on the social networking platforms for accessing their customers, and it is these large platforms that, as radio and TV before them, are making monetary gains from advertising to the customers. At the same time, since customers are on social media, the platform companies are exploiting and are gaining a superior knowledge of how social networks and customer communities behave and are organised. This thesis has served to bring further attention toward the value that brands can gain by focusing on building a direct two-way conversation with their customers and by nurturing their brand communities for better brand identity management.

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8. APPENDIXES

Appendix 1. Research Questionnaire

1. Could you describe briefly, who you are and what do you do for your company?
2. What are the cornerstones of your brand? / What are your brand's core values?
3. Have your values changed over time?
4. How do you communicate these values to your customers?
5. What keeps your customers loyal to your brand?
6. How do you include customer feedback into the communications? Marketing communications and also other customer communications if you can talk about it and can you give an example?
7. How do your customers impact your brand identity?
8. What is the importance of word of mouth in your identity?
9. Do you measure social media? In other words, do you measure what the outcome of your social media efforts is?
10. Do you measure your brand value and if yes, how?
11. Do you measure word of mouth?
12. What do you think your customers value in general?
13. What is their (customers') passion? Or, what are your customers passionate about?
14. Are there shared values within you and your customers?
15. Do you have a strong customer community and is there a lot of interaction?
16. Is your brand also appreciated among other communities? For example, are there other existing communities where people are talking about your brand?

17. Did you help any of these communities to form?
18. Do these communities have common traditions or rituals?
19. Are you actively nurturing these communities and how?